Social Studies Teaching and Learning

Volume 1, Issue 1

An open-source peer-reviewed journal of the

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From Image to Inference: Three Eighth Grade Students' Meaning Making with an Informational History-Themed Graphic Novel

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Abstract

Graphic novels are sophisticated and complex texts suited for use in curriculum across content areas. This study explores three eighth-grade students' meaning making as they engaged in think aloud protocols while reading *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009). We draw on multimodal social semiotic theory and methods from constructivist grounded theory to examine the modal affordances of graphic novels in promoting a diverse array of interpretive strategies, as well as students' emotional transactions with the Gettysburg Address. Specifically, we highlight findings that illustrate how students made emotional, visual, and linguistic inferences to negotiate meanings between semiotic systems. These findings suggest that multimodal literacy practices, such as reading graphic novels, can mobilize and expand the interpretive strategies students use to support their learning about historical events, including the Gettysburg Address, as they engage in perspective taking and emotive empathy.

Keywords: graphic novels, multimodal literacy, meaning making, emotive empathy

Graphic novels and comics have permeated popular culture. They are regularly mined by Hollywood for inspiration. The most obvious are the ever-present Marvel and DC Comics, but there are many other productions taken directly from graphic novels including *The Road to Perdition* (Collins, 2005), *The Kingsmen: The Secret Service* (Millar, 2012), *300* (Miller, 1999), and the wildly popular *The Walking Dead* (Kirkman, 2006). A term introduced in 1978 to describe Will Eisner's *A Contract with God*, graphic novels are book length comic narratives of either original text or a collection of existing comics in a single story arc (Carter, 2007). The popularity of graphic novels is reflective of changes in how literacy is practiced in the 21st century. From computer screens, to televisions and our phones, we are surrounded by texts that integrate multiple modes of communication, including language, images, sounds, and action (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). To be able to comprehend multimodal texts, readers must make meaning from both the individual modes, as well as the synergistic integration of modes (Serafini, 2014).

The 2010 publication of the Common Core State Standards reflected this move to multimodal texts. Reading anchor standard seven states that students should be able to "integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words" (Council for Chief State School Officers [CCSS], 2010). The reading and writing standards for history emphasized the need to address

disciplinary literacy within social studies instruction. Within these standards, reading history anchor standard seven states that students should "integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts," which is a content specific version of the broader anchor standard previously described (CCSSO, 2010). The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework published in 2013 clearly outlines the connection between these reading anchor standards and the inquiry processes within social studies (Lee & Swan, 2013). As a multimodal text, with information conveyed through both images and language, graphic novels require readers to process written text, images, placement, action, and the interaction of these modes in order to infer meaning from the text.

Although graphic novels have been read in and outside of English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms for some time, scholars are only beginning to address how readers approach these texts, make sense of their contents, and use them to bolster their comprehension (Brenna, 2013; Meyer & Jiménez, 2017). Moeller (2015) discussed students' perceptions of reading graphic novels in the classroom. Students appreciated the reading experience afforded by the format.
However, they also hesitated to accept the pedagogical use of graphic novels in the classroom because of the format's perceived marginalized status among adults. Students in Pantaleo's (2011) study showed an appreciation of the artistic nature of graphic novels as well as the complexities of the reading experience. To that point, Pantaleo encourages educators to provide students with opportunities to make meaning during the reading process by teaching students the elements of graphic novels, providing students with concrete instruction on the features and aspects contained within graphic novels, and teaching students how a graphic novel should be read. Within the social studies, this is especially imperative as educators seek to address changing conceptualizations of disciplinary literacy and the role of inquiry-based learning.

Graphic Novels and the Social Studies

Graphic novels are available in all genres of both fiction and nonfiction, but an ever-increasing number are addressing social studies content (Sheffield, Chisholm, & Howell, 2015). Graphic novels by their nature include integration of visual and linguistic information. At its most basic, reading graphic novels requires students to employ literacy strategies to process and comprehend the multimodal text. However, the complexity of the text affords the reader the opportunity to engage in disciplinary literacy, as well. In social studies, and history in particular, this requires deep analysis of source material while exploring an author's perspective, biases, interpretation, and agenda (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Included within the vision of powerful social studies education, which was reissued in 2016 by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), was a call for a focus on disciplinary literacy instruction in order to prepare students for their lives in the workplace

and in future education. Powerful social studies is described as instruction that is meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active. Additionally, NCSS described powerful social studies as including varied source material from integrated disciplines (i.e. arts, humanities, science) in order to engage in an inquiry process. Graphic novels provide a way for readers to take up complex reading processes by accessing multiple modes of representation of an historical event.

Reading a graphic novel provides the student an opportunity to engage in the process of disciplinary literacy with both visual and linguistic text. Students can be challenged to examine the author's and illustrator's choices regarding what to include and exclude from the story, how ideas are conveyed visually, and how the story is structured. For example, Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* (1986) and *Maus II* (1992) use animals as stand-ins for groups of people in the telling of his father's Holocaust experience: Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Poles are pigs, and Americans are dogs. He draws the visuals in a stark black and white, which adds a sense of foreboding to the images. Spiegelman utilizes flashbacks within the text in order to place his current relationship with his father in the context of the Holocaust narrative. All of these are choices Spiegelman made in his interpretation of his father's lived experience of the Holocaust. In analyzing these choices and contextualizing the graphic novel, students would engage in the process of historical source work, which is a form of disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

In addition to the source work and literacy opportunities associated with integrating graphic novels within social studies instruction, an argument can be made that the format may aid in the development of emotive empathy, which is a contextualized emotional connection that the reader makes with the event and characters within a text (Chisholm, Shelton, & Sheffield, 2017). Emotive empathy, when used to interpret history-based text, lies at the intersection of *historical contextualization* and *affective connection* of Endacott and Brooks' (2013) visual conceptualization of historical empathy. Through this consideration, emotive empathy can be seen as a building block toward students' development of historical empathy. The visual nature of the graphic novel offers the reader a window through which to view the historical event or time, which allows them to explore the emotions and actions of individuals in the past.

Marcus, Metzger, Paxton and Stoddard (2010) have made the case that Hollywood films can be a beneficial tool for developing historical empathy. Emotions, events, interactions, and settings can be seen by the reader and used as a scaffold upon which to construct an understanding of the actions and perspectives in the past. Much like choices are made by the filmmaker with regard to casting, settings, interactions, and dialogue as an interpretation of the past, so too do graphic novelists make intentional compositional decisions. For example, authors and illustrators of graphic novels make interpretive choices in how a historical subject is depicted. The reader must delineate between the choices made in the historical interpretation and the information available to develop historical empathy. This is the same process one must undergo when viewing historical film--what is artistic

license? And what is rooted in historical scholarship?

There is an emerging literature describing the ways in which graphic novels can be used to mediate learning about social studies content (Clabough & Carano, 2015; Sheffield, Chisholm, & Howell, 2015). Cromer and Clark (2007) outlined the unique perspective that graphic novels, with their combined visual and linguistic texts, provide readers in the social studies including an easily accessible format, an opportunity for students to deconstruct the visuals, and access to multiple perspectives of historical accounts. Youngs and Serafini (2011) detailed the complicated nature of utilizing multimodal texts in the social studies classroom, particularly in how students can use these texts to understand the various perspectives that shape the past. They call on teachers to not only become better informed through their own reading of multimodal texts, but also to be intentional when teaching students how to interact with and analyze these texts through a historical lens. Snow and Robbins (2015) echo the advice for teachers to carefully attend to the multimodal texts they use in the classroom. Through critical readings of four historical graphic novels, they found that biases and inaccuracies may be more prone to occur within these texts, noting that teachers should allow for critical interpretations of these graphic histories. By comparing four graphic novels about the *Battle of the Alamo*, Snow and Robbins delineate such discrepancies as misleading numbers, misrepresented illustrations, singular perspectives, and incorrect vocabulary which may lead students to adopt a problematized understanding of historical events.

Although there is research examining the reading and interpretive processes students use to engage with graphic novel literary texts (Liu, 2004; Sabeti, 2013; Schwarz, 2006), few empirical studies exist that delineate the instructional affordances of graphic novel informational texts, specifically in the social studies. While graphic novels like *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2004), *The Watchmen* (Moore, 1986)*, Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986), and *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2008) are frequently cited in the emerging education research literature (Christensen, 2006), few studies address graphic novel informational texts such as *Gettysburg: A graphic novel* (Butzer, 2009), *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* (Fetter-Vorm, 2012), and *The Great American Documents: Volume 1: 1620-1830* (Ashby & Colón, 2014). Bosma, Rule, and Krueger (2013) studied fifth-graders' readings of graphic novels and nonfiction texts centered around the American Revolution. Students were able to glean more information from graphic novels than from the nonfiction texts. Students also reported greater levels of interest and enjoyment when reading graphic novels as opposed to reading nonfiction texts. Similarly, instruction with picture books, another multimodal format utilized in social studies classrooms, shaped deep interpretations of texts by young readers (Arizpe & Styles, 2003) and supported fifth-grade students' discussions of historical fiction picture books (Youngs, 2012).

Reading Strategies

Over the past six decades, literacy researchers have theorized, studied, and

documented the ways in which readers use various reading strategies to support their memory and comprehension of print texts (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1991; Pressley, 2002). These socio- cognitive strategies highlight how readers build complex text worlds and schema for comprehending narrative and expository texts by processing and anticipating action in texts related to plot and character development (Anderson, 2013). Typical reading strategies that have been shown to improve students' comprehension include summarization, self-questioning, prior- knowledge activation, imagery construction, and readers' identification of story grammars (Pressley & Harris, 1990). Researchers have argued that such organizational structures can scaffold the reading process, including the development of processes such as inferencing (Anderson & Pearson, 1984).

Building on the argument of McVee, Dunsmore, and Gavelek (2013), we situate the use of cognitive reading strategies within a sociocultural perspective on literacy and reading as a transactional (Rosenblatt, 1978; Beach & Myers, 2001), meaning-making (Bomer, 2011), and socio-emotional process (Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2015). As readers make inferences about characters in texts, they often take into account how a character is represented emotionally, as well as their own emotional responses to the text (Thein et al.,2015). Because emotion is an integral part of day to day school interactions, and readers often respond to literature in waysthat reflect their own lives, an emotional response to text is both frequent and common(Gernsbacher, Goldsmith, & Robertson, 1992). As Gernsbacher, Goldsmith, and Robertson (1992) note, a representation of emotional state may be formed in relation to readers' perceived understandings of characters' actions, relationships, and goals within a text. This type of inference automatically activates readers' prior knowledge around emotions, and is part of their reading comprehension process regardless of whether emotional states are implicitly or explicitly stated (Gernsbacher, Hallada, & Robertson, 1998).

Given the cognitive and socio-emotional ways in which students read, process, and make meaning about print texts, and in light of the 21st century texts (e.g., graphic novel) and literacy practices (e.g., reading visual texts) with which adolescents engage, we reimagine these strategies for meaning making through the lens of multimodality. This study takes a multimodal social semiotic perspective to examine adolescent readers' meaning making about the events and people surrounding the Battle of Gettysburg and the Gettysburg Address as depicted in *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009). Drawing on the concept of transmediation, which involves the recasting of meanings across sign systems (Siegel, 1995; Siegel, 2006), we build our argument on the literature that describes how moving from the visual semiotic system into the linguistic semiotic system results in non-redundant and generative interpretations of text (Kress, 2010; Serafini, 2014). We extend this literature with a focus on informational text conveyed through the graphic novel genre among middle school social studies students.

This study was designed to answer the following research questions. 1) Which reading (visual and linguistic) strategies do three eighth-grade students employ to interpret

an historical graphic novel? 2) How do three eighth-grade students use reading strategies to interpret an historical graphic novel?

Methods

This three-part study was conducted in an eighth grade United States history class in a large Title 1 middle school, Churchill MS (pseudonym). Located in a midsize Midwestern city, the school reports a diverse student population: 47% white, 37.7% African-American, 8.8% Hispanic, and 6.5% classified as other, with 62.9% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch (Jefferson County Public Schools [JCPS], 2015). Students enrolled in the United States history class participated in two lessons utilizing *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009). Thirteen student participants took part in one of three researcher-led focus group interviews inquiring into students' impressions of reading graphic novels in the social studies, and how they gathered information from the text. From this group of thirteen, three individuals were selected for a think-aloud interview, as described below.

Lesson Activity

All students in the class participated in a researcher-led two-day lesson on the Battle of Gettysburg using C.M. Butzer's (2009) *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* as a primary instructional tool. We selected the text for two reasons: 1) the novel focused on the current instructional content for the class (the class was at a midpoint in their Civil War unit); and 2) a class set of the text was available for use. *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009) tells the story of the Battle of Gettysburg and the Gettysburg Address, with a focus on the soldiers and townspeople who were most affected by this historical event. Through the use of three colors (blue, white, and black), Butzer streamlines the narrative by intentionally drawing readers to the faces of the individuals portrayed. Additionally, the use of limited colors mimics the photography of the era, as well as enhances the solemnity of the subjectmatter.

Prior to reading the focal graphic novel, students engaged in a warm-up activity inquiring about their previous experience with other graphic novels. As advocated by many authors in the literature (e.g., Pantaleo, 2011; Youngs & Serafini, 2011), we provided pre-reading instruction (Allen, 2005) on the structure of a graphic novel using an excerpt from *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* (Fetter-Vorm, 2012). During this activity, students were introduced to text bubbles, panels, gutters, imagery, and iconography, which are some of the central tools graphic novelists use to portray a narrative (Eisner, 1996; McCloud, 1994).

Following this introductory activity, each student was issued a copy of the graphic novel and a task to complete as a during-reading activity. The students were to summarize the information gleaned from each two-page spread as they silently read the text for the remainder of the class period, approximately 60 minutes, recording their information on the

provided three- slide PowerPoint handout of the 33 two-page spreads encompassing *Gettysburg*.

On the second day of instruction students were given a RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) assignment in order to process the information gathered from reading the graphic novel (Santa, Havens, & Valdes, 2004). The RAFT assignment asked the students to select a role (a Union soldier, a Confederate soldier, or a resident of Gettysburg). They then wrote a letter, newspaper article, a song/poem, or a comic strip, from this perspective, in order to tell future generations about the Battle of Gettysburg, the impact of the battle on the town's citizens, or the Gettysburg Address (see Appendix).

Upon completing their RAFT activity, participants engaged in one of three focus group discussions led by the researchers. These focus group discussions were designed to provide students with an opportunity to process information from the text, to share their reactions to the graphic novel format, to discuss their opinions about graphic novels as a teaching tool, and to share how they read the multimodal text. From these small group discussions three students were selected for individual think-aloud interviews. We articulate our rationale for selecting each focal student below.

Think-Aloud Interviews

The three students identified for the think-aloud interview included Sarah (white, female), Ken (African-American, male), and Wes, (biracial, male) (all names are pseudonyms). These three students were chosen based on four criteria. 1) Students reflected the racial diversity of the larger class. 2) All three students were engaged in the silent reading portion of the lesson, as indicated by both researcher observations and the completion of their during-reading task. 3) Each of the three students chose a different format through which to complete their RAFTS: Sarah created a comic strip, Wes wrote a poem, and Ken wrote a letter. 4) Their participation in a small group discussion, during which they were able to vocalize their interactions with the graphic novel, indicated that the participants possessed an ability and interest to actively engage in a think-aloud. We acknowledge that our participant selection was purposeful and the selection size small. As such, the results of this study are not generalizable. However, the richness of the information gleaned from the think aloud interviews shed light on the process these three readers used to make meaning about an historical graphic novel.

Each of the three students met with one of the three researchers in the school's library to read excerpts from the graphic novel through a think aloud protocol (VanSledright, Kelly, & Meuwissen, 2006). We first explained the protocol by telling students that we were asking them to read aloud different pages of the graphic novel. We began the protocol by modeling a think aloud using two pages of text. As we read, we paused and elaborated on ideas that the reading of the text generated, asked questions about visual or linguistic elements, made connections with previously read material, and called into question previously held beliefs about the historical elements featured in the text. We then invited

students to engage in this process themselves.

The students read 25 pages of the graphic novel, conveying their interpretations as they read each panel and page. The selected pages included an image-only two-page spread of the battlefield, Lincoln's arrival in Gettysburg, which includes a visual representation of the crowd singing "John Brown's Body", and Lincoln's delivery of the Gettysburg Address. We chose these three excerpts for their diverse modal affordances and to focus on the informational text portrayed in the author's interpretation of primary sources (i.e. the song and the address). We also asked the students to read their RAFT aloud and to describe their reasons for crafting the document as they did.

Powerful social studies instruction includes attention to disciplinary literacy, focusing on informational text and diverse source materials. The marriage of a graphic novel with a primary source provided an interesting opportunity. While the text of the Gettysburg Address is well- known and unaltered, the way in which the author chose to illustrate the Address provides opportunities for students to connect to and comprehend the primary source.

Data Analysis

We drew on typical methods for qualitative analysis, including transcribing audio recordings of talk, coding transcripts for patterns and themes, and engaging in iterative processes of analytical writing and revising. Although we discuss the analytic process in a linear fashion below, qualitative data analysis is always recursive, iterative, and dialogic in nature, as one analytic advance reconstitutes previous analytic interpretations and likewise informs subsequent interpretations of the data.

Transcribing. Each researcher created a transcript for the interview he or she conducted. Since the structure of the transcript reflects the theory and analysis guiding the investigation, (Mishler, 1991; Ochs, 1979), we privileged the speaker first by placing the respondent's name in the far left-hand column of the transcript. Next to the speaker's name, we reproduced the language that was uttered during the think-aloud protocol. First, we segmented participants' utterances according to the frame about which they seemed to be responding. However, we soon realized that participants did not always limit their responses to one single frame, but vacillated between local details (e.g., visual and linguistic) in a single frame and the larger context available in the panel. Coupled with this realization, and as is expected during the constant comparative method, we recognized patterns and themes in the data, which led us to further segment utterances in the transcript into codes. Finally, we created a space for researcher memoing to process coding, provide provisional interpretations of the data, and make connections to the literature (Table 1).

Table 1

Transcribing, Coding, and Memoing Example

Speaker	Utterance	Code	Memo
Ken	"That those who fought her so nobly advanced." That means they have advanced it as far as progress.	Linguistic Inference	Slight misconception the author's use of the meaning advanced

Coding. Transcript analysis occurred first through incident-with-incident coding (Charmaz, 2014) of the think aloud interview transcripts. We collectively read one interview transcript, mining for initial codes that we constructed with the data. Tentatively using these initial codes, we individually analyzed transcripts of all three interviews, naming additional codes that we identified in the data. We refined and compared focus codes across transcripts, in order to develop themes. We used the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to ensure coding fidelity across data sources during a final cycle of coding. We created a table to compare coding frequencies across the three think aloud interview transcripts with a final member check for any outlying codes (Table 2).

Table 2

Think Aloud Interview Code Frequency

	Code Frequency			
Identified Codes	**Wes**	**Ken**	**Sara**	**Total**
Visual Inference of Emotion	5	10	26	41
Visual Inference of Content	28	20	32	80
Linguistic Inference	12	9	0	21
Hypothesis	6	0	0	6
Narration of Visual Information	3	16	21	40
Narration of Linguistic Information	8	20	2	30
Verbalization of Reading Strategy	0	0	10	10
Verbalization of Visual Literacy Strategy	0	1	8	9

Verbalization of Personal Connection	2	2	2	6
TOTAL	**64**	**78**	**101**	**243**

Findings

To negotiate meanings between visual and linguistic modes of the graphic novel, students drew on the meaning making strategies of inferencing, hypothesizing, narrating, and personally connecting with the text. Students' read-alouds resulted in unique literacy strategies and different interpretive patterns to generate meanings about the text. Although students' meaning making across sign systems generated myriad interpretations through multiple meaning making modes, we also recognized how some interpretations reflected students' confusion in negotiating meaning between the linguistic and visual texts present in the graphic novel. Additionally, we examined each student's written RAFT for connections to the information presented within the graphic novel, and how that student chose to interpret the events of the Battle of Gettysburg and the *Gettysburg Address*. We outline these patterns for each reader in the sections below.

Inferencing

We delineated three subcategories of students' spontaneous uses of inferencing strategies in the data; these included: visual inferencing (reasoned conclusions based on visual content), emotional inferencing (reasoned conclusions based on emotional response), and linguistic inferencing (reasoned conclusions based on linguistic text) (see Table 2).

Students used visual inferencing strategies 121 times during the three think-alouds.Ken's utterance that follows typified the inferences all three students made from the images about the content of the graphic novel: "Well because I saw that and with the big hat and how tall he was– because Lincoln was a really tall president. And, they are all really excited to see him – so I am guessing it is the President and the President at the time was Lincoln." Ken draws on his knowledge of iconography (Lincoln's hat) and historical context (Lincoln was the president during the U.S. Civil War) to make the inference that Lincoln was the figure moving through the crowd. Similarly, Wes makes the following inference based on another panel found on the same page, "And it seems like a pretty big event. 'Cause this guy's hair looks pretty slicked over and slicked down, and trimmed beard..." In noting the appearance of the man greeting President Lincoln, Wes inferred significance to the meeting and the presence of the gathering outside the building. While examining the same two-page spread, Sara also employed visual inferencing in her description of the crowd's actions. "Well, there they look really concentrated on singing, and it looks like they're singing to Mr. Lincoln, like to the window." Her inference that the people were singing to President Lincoln was based on the depiction of a silhouette in the window that

resembles the shape of the author's depiction of Lincoln. For all three students, visual inferencing most frequently characterized their reading processes during the think aloud protocol.

Emotional inferencing is illustrated during Sarah's think aloud, "He's looking at the speech he's gonna give and he seemed like really nervous about that. … It's like his mouth is curled kind of. And it looks like he's really nervous. Then he's staring out the window. That made it seem like he was more nervous, 'cause he needed something to distract him." Sarah draws explicitly in this excerpt on a visual element (Lincoln's face) and her own experience of emotional response to make an inference that he was nervous, which informed her reading of mood in this text. In another example, Sarah again draws on Lincoln's facial features to make the emotional inference that Lincoln is sad, which she supports with a visual reading of the panel of Lincoln as he prepares to give the Gettysburg Address. "On this page, he seemed, like he seemed kind of sad about what he was going to start saying. The way his mouth is curled downward and the fact that the wrinkles were right above his eyebrows." Sarah engaged in emotional inferencing more often than Ken or Wes, who were more likely than Sarah to make linguistic inferences. That said, both Ken and Wes did infer emotion, as well, as typified by the following statement from Ken as he examines an image of Lincoln pacing on a platform as he prepares to speak to a large, socioeconomically diverse crowd (as reflected by their clothing), visibly eager to hear his words. "I'm looking at the crowd. They all seem captivated and really excited to see Lincoln." Ken is inferring excitement and captivation not from a linguistic text, as the two-page spread is essentially wordless, but from the facial expression the illustrator drew on the audience. Wes also explores the emotional state of the crowd during Lincoln's address. "So I guess since everyone's face besides this guy looks pretty spooked or shocked, kind of scared, that what he's saying to them—how important the war was and how maybe there shouldn't be any other wars…" He inferred the sad or shocked emotion from the facial expressions seen in a profile image of the crowd. In the picture, no one is drawn smiling; all the individuals are portrayed with downturned mouths, and some are pictured with their mouths agape. To Wes, these people were drawn conveying a sad or apprehensive emotion. Interestingly, he makes an inferential leap to saying "shouldn't be any other wars," which does not seem to be linked to either the visual or the linguistic text.

Linguistic inferencing occurred when participants used primarily written language in the graphic novel to make meanings about the text. For example, after Ken reads "It is altogether fitting that we should do this. In a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we can not hallow this ground" (Butzer, 2009, p. 54), he makes the following linguistic inference: "That's kind of like saying… the big picture of this is that they cannot do anything to this ground, this is their final resting place forever, you can't do anything to it." In another example, Wes makes this comment about a lyric from "John Brown's Body," the song sung by the crowd as Lincoln drafts his speech: "[O]r maybe he's going to the army, the way they're saying it: 'He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord.'"

Although he misinterpreted the lyrics, most likely from a lack of content knowledge and not knowing who John Brown was, he did utilize inferencing as a tool to construct meaning from the text. Interestingly, Sarah, who frequently made inferences from images, did not make a single inference from the linguistic text. Ken's visual inference of Lincoln's iconic top hat, Sarah's emotional inference of Lincoln's facial expression, and Wes's linguistic inference-- albeit misinformed--of the song, "John Brown's Body" are illustrated and point to the multimodal sources of information on which participants drew to inform their historical understandings around the Gettysburg Address.

Narrating and Meaning-Making Patterns

All three students narrated both visual and linguistic information, with 70 occurrences in three interviews. Ken typically followed a pattern of narrating the panel text followed by the images, as demonstrated in this excerpt. "The next panel says 'And dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' I see a White woman, a Native American, and Black woman, and a Black male. Then, I see a Union soldier, so another white male." However, not all of the students moved from narrating the linguistic text to narrating the visual text.

Wes more typically read the visual images before returning to the linguistic text, as in the following example.

> In these three boxes, it looks like he's writing a speech for his event. … So he's writing something pretty big and then, I guess, the people are still out there, so he looks out the window. And he decides to go to it. And the people are all singing something. Something about, something about a guy named John Brown, who might have been in the war or something.

Wes looked first at the panels in which Abraham Lincoln appears to be writing in a room above the gathered crowd and described his actions as depicted in the images. Accessing the visual text in this panel, Wes followed the President's gaze out the window to ground below where he then described the crowd as singing "John Brown's Body," as indicated by the lyrics written over the panels' images.

Sara vacillated between narrating the linguistic text and narrating the visual text. In one example, she reads the linguistic text first before layering a visual reading that confirms her initial impression: "The world will little note nor will long remember what we say here. But it can never forget what it did here. In the panel there is a black person's hands and the chains breaking." In this instance, the visual image of a slave's hands breaking apart the chains that held him captive promotes a projective reading of the linguistic text: "But it can never forget what they did here." Alternatively, Sara often narrated the visual image prior to narrating the written language of the Address: "And then the speech talks about like liberty is the biggest thing that people cared about when they formed a new nation, and they formed a new nation here, so that symbolizes that.." In this narration, Sara paraphrases the language of

the *Gettysburg Address* as she moves toward interpretation and symbolism. Before she does so, however, she addresses the visual elements of the text: "Well it's like people of a lot of different races and genders. So we have, African Americans, people who were in slavery, they're sad. Somebody from Asia. And then, I think that one's supposed to be Native American." As students moved through comprehending the text, their narrations functioned to springboard other meaning making strategies.

Hypothesizing

One student, Wes, occasionally used hypothesizing as a comprehension strategy. He verbalized possible ideas to explain the information provided in the images and text of the graphic novel. In the following excerpt, Wes attempts to frame an understanding of a scene in which the crowd is singing "John Brown's Body" outside Lincoln's window. "The people are all singing something; something about a guy named John Brown, who might have been in the war or something. Or they might be remembering and telling Abe Lincoln something. So I guess there could possibly have been another person named Jeff Davis who might have been in the war."

Although Wes appears to know little about some of the key figures in the Civil War, he is actively utilizing a hypothesizing literacy strategy as he proposes and tests theories based on the clues within the text. This hypothesizing move draws on both the linguistic elements in the frame as well as the visual elements. Musical notations flank undulating lines of text that read: "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave…" (Butzer, 2009, p. 43). Students hypothesizing to make sense of information that may be new or unfamiliar to them is a long taught strategy with print-only texts and is only enhanced here by taking into account both the linguistic and visual elements of the text.

Verbalizing Strategies

All students had occasions where they made personal connections with the text. When reflecting on Lincoln's actions the night before the *Gettysburg Address*, Sarah shared the following insight:

> Well, in the one before he said he was going to bed and then he didn't he's staying up. Like, whenever I'm nervous for something I don't really sleep very well, and then, he's like looking—his face, and he's looking at the speech he's going to give and he seemed like really nervous about that.

Similarly, Ken linked his experiences in band to his ability to process the song the crowd is singing. "I see these musical notes, and I am in band so I know what that means." As Will considered the visual depiction of Abraham Lincoln writing, he stated "In these three boxes, it looks like he's writing a speech for his event. Like kind of like a graduation speech, but

he's not really graduating. So he's writing something pretty big." As is the case with making meaning with print-only texts, making connections between the reader's world and the world of the text is key to promoting comprehension.

Historical Interpretation and Perspective Taking

Each of the students participating in the two-day lesson was asked to complete a RAFT processing task. The students were given choices of role (a Union soldier, a Confederate soldier, or a townsperson), format (a letter, a poem, a newspaper article, or a comic), and topic (the events of the battle, the impact on the citizens, or the message of the address). The students were asked to write the document to someone in another place and/or time. The use of RAFT writing provided the students in the class with an opportunity to process and provide their own interpretation of the information from the graphic novel. These activities are linked to historical interpretation and perspective taking (Barton & Levstik, 2004), which are components of disciplinary literacy in the social studies (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Sarah, Ken, and Wes each chose a different format, topic, and role, providing three divergent approaches to interpreting the events depicted in the graphic novel.

Sara chose to create a comic strip interpreting key excerpts of the *Gettysburg Address* in images, much the same way that Butzer (2009) chose to do in the graphic novel. She did not identify a perspective, as suggested in the RAFT assignment; rather she took on the persona of a third party interpreter, which one could argue is more in keeping with traditional historical interpretation. She created a five panel comic using the Comic Life™ (Plasq, 2020) application for iPads. In the first and last panels, she inserted images of Abraham Lincoln giving a speech. In the first panel, Lincoln is facing an audience that is on the right side of the image. Sarah has inserted a speech bubble from Lincoln's mouth with the text "Four score and seven years ago…" In the last panel, Sarah utilized a picture of Lincoln addressing a crowd that is on the left side of the image, essentially bookending the comic. In that final panel, Sarah inserted a speech bubble for Lincoln that states "... that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." According to Sarah, she chose to begin and end her comic with images of him giving a speech so that her reader "would know it was his speech and you would see he cared about the speech all the way through." In the three other panels, Sarah was similarly intentional in her image selection. In one panel, she linked two text boxes stating, "Our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition" and included an image of the committee to craft the Declaration of Independence, ostensibly the fathers of the nation. With the text "all men are created equal," she imported an image of five racially diverse babies. According to Sarah, "Like it says all men are created equal, to me meant all the people.
So, the little children they didn't care. They're like this is my friend. They didn't care at all."
The fourth panel is absent of written text. It does, however, have the 33-star American flag,

which was the nation's flag during the first part of the U.S. Civil War. While Sarah's comic was fairly short, she demonstrated that she could both comprehend the document and convey her understanding of the salient message of the excerpted section of the *Gettysburg Address*.

Wes approached the RAFT assignment in a more personal, and emotional, manner than did Sarah. He chose to write a poem entitled "Farewell" the text of which is provided below.

Farewell
Cleaning the floor
Sweeping up my drops of sweat
When I hear the door
I have to catch my breath.

Here comes the South
Searching through my
stuff I shut my baby's
mouth And now it's
getting rough

There's their
wagon Loading
all my stuff
The uniforms remind me of
dragons I wish to tell them
enough

There they go
With all my
possessions I wish I
could say no
Now it's time for a confession

Wes chose to base his poem on an event presented near the beginning of the graphic novel. On that page, Butzer (2009) has depicted the Southern soldiers as looting provisions from the Gettysburg townspeople, as ordered by Generals Lee and Longstreet in the first panel of the page. The events on the page are supposition on Butzer's part, and are not augmented by the additional historical context offered in the author's note of the graphic novel. What this page does, however, is position the reader to witness how the townspeople of Gettysburg may have been directly impacted by the events of the battle. It is this perspective that Wes explores in his poem.

Wes is clearly drawing on emotions in order to connect to the events of the Battle of Gettysburg, as depicted in the graphic novel. He is basing his entire interpretation of the event on two images. The first includes a woman, with a young child hanging onto her skirt, openinga door to a group of soldiers. Her face, as well as that of the man of the family, are drawn in such a way as to convey surprise, their mouths are agape, hands splayed, and eyes are wide. The second image from which he draws his ideas is one in which soldiers are taking supplies from the family, including bags of flour and cans of coffee. The woman is in the background of the image, with her hands clasped.

Wes interprets these two images, which focus on the impact of the battle on the citizens, through an emotional lens, specifically anxiety and fear. In the think aloud discussion of the stanza in which Wes references shutting his baby's mouth, he states the following.

> I did not know there's a baby, but I kind of made that up. Out of all the homes, there might have at least been one, so. And usually. He might have been starting to cry. I've seen movies, this might sound violent, but when someone is about to kill someone they like tell them to shut their baby or kill the baby first and then kill them. So that's where I got that from. And then, "now it's getting rough." Now they're taking all their stuff. And they're not talking to them and just taking all their stuff. And she looks really worried. She doesn't want to do anything cuz she knows they're probably going to kill them or her. So she's just gonna stayquiet.

It is clear that Wes is drawing upon his prior experiences with other multimodal texts, in this case movies, to make meaning from the looting images. While he may, or may not, have direct experience with having something stolen from him, he has had vicarious experience through movies. He imagines the way in which the woman might have felt if strangers had entered her home and taken her possessions. In taking on this perspective, Wes was able to provide an interpretation of the battle that would be difficult to make using traditional sources, which are either text based or images of the battle's aftermath. Instead, he drew emotions from the images and linked them with his prior experiences in order to construct an understanding.

For his RAFT processing task, Ken chose to write a letter from the perspective of a Union veteran of the Battle of Gettysburg. His letter, which is written to his character's future children, is provided below.

> Dear Children,
>
> By the time you read this I will be gone from this world, but I want my legacy to live on. So I will tell of the epic Battle of Gettysburg, a battle of which I was part of, and lived to tell the tale.
>
> The date was July 1, 1863. Rebels were gathering the day before. Now, they

are advancing. We couldn't take them on, for there were too many. General Bufford saw this, but had a different plan.

While we were pushed back, these rebs foraged the town for supplies. Raiding anywhere they could get into. This angered me, seeing as they were taking food people worked hard for.

The next day, at "Little Round Top," there was a battle. This time, we would not back down. We seemed to gain the advantage when we advanced with our bayonets. How many I killed I don't know. There was much bloodshed on the Confederacy side. But the true blood would come the next day.

This would be a last day of conflict, and the bloodiest. General Pickett of the Confederacy made a horrible blunder. It was seen that after the South would shoot their cannons, they would advance. We held our cannons until then. Then, we unleashed our bombardment. Less than half their artillery was left.

That day, while many were killed, so was my friend, William. A grand ceremony was held for the fallen. But, I am thankful I walked away.

In his letter, Ken retells the events of the battle chronologically, using the both narrative and emotional pathways. He augmented his retelling of the events of the battle with information from the author's note. Ken provides details about Little Round Top and Pickett's charge in the letter that were not readily available in the panels of the graphic novel; they were provided in the supplemental information in the author's note. As such, Ken created his own historical interpretation of the Battle of Gettysburg, which is an example of disciplinary literacy in history.

Like Wes, Ken seemed to be affected by what he perceived as injustice in the looting of supplies from the townspeople. In the think-aloud discussion of his RAFT letter, Ken makes the following statement, "While I was writing this I was thinking how would a soldier feel if they took from the people who worked hard for it." While it is a point of possible debate whether or not a Civil War era soldier would have felt the anger about looting as described by Ken, he taps into his own emotions in order to process the events of the battle, and as a way to understand the perspective of the Union soldier. He is demonstrating emotive empathy (Chisholm, Shelton, & Sheffield, 2017), which we suggest is a part of the historical empathy described by Endacott and Brooks (2013).

Discussion & Implications

Students negotiated meanings in the multimodal graphic novel by using traditional literacy strategies including inferencing, hypothesizing, narrating, and verbalizing to make personal connections with the text. Making visual inferences to construct meaning about the

text was the most frequently occurring reading strategy used by the students and is a unique affordance of the multimodal graphic novel. While Ken and Wes used primarily linguistic (but also visual) inferences to negotiate meanings, Sara used emotional inferencing to interpret the text. Although neither Sara nor Ken used hypothesizing strategies to move through the text, Wes made educated guesses as to how certain linguistic and visual elements foretold the narrative he was reading.

All three students narrated the graphic novels in distinct ways; however, they all drew on both the visual and the linguistic in order to make meaning. Wes read the visual images as a primary text against which the linguistic text served to support or contradict his meaning making. Ken read the linguistic text first before confirming his reading with the visual elements on the page. Sara took a rather eclectic approach; sometimes she read the visual text first before turning to the written text, and sometimes she read the linguistic text before she read the visual text. In verbalizing their thoughts, students made personal connections to the content of the graphic novel, which supported their sensemaking. Key findings from our analysis demonstrate the ways in which students used the visual text to interpret emotion and the literacy strategies and reading patterns they used to negotiate meanings between the linguistic and the visual texts to interpret the content of the graphic novel.

The personal connections the students made with the text and the emotion-related inferences the students made when reading the graphic novel have implications for the role of emotive empathy in multimodal social studies education. Connecting with individuals in an informational text, like this graphic novel, through emotions and prior experience helps students to humanize historical figures and to acknowledge varied perspectives and experiences. Seeing the struggle, emotion, and hardship on the faces of soldiers, civilians, and political figures during this period in U.S. history prompted students to connect to people of the time as they learned about one of the nation's most famous speeches. This process garnered what can best be called emotive empathy, or emotional caring, (Chisholm, Shelton, & Sheffield, 2017) in the three students. This emotive empathy, as seen in this study, fits well within the *affective connection to the past* of Endacott and Brooks's (2013) model of historical empathy. The students did attempt to interpret the events of Battle of Gettysburg and the *Gettysburg Address* as depicted in the graphic novel. One could make the argument that the students' lack of content knowledge and their present-minded view of how the individuals of the past would think and feel hindered a fully developed demonstration of historical empathy. However, their emotional engagement with the text, both the visual and textual, helped the students to see these historical figures as something other than abstract constructs of the past. The emotional connection they made with the scenes in the graphic novel shaped how these students saw the individuals as people who experienced loss, anger, sadness, and anxiety. Having students recognize historical figures as

real, and fallible, people can only encourage them to have a more nuanced understanding of the past.

It should be noted that in a few instances the visuals led to misinterpretations (e.g., misreading the uniforms for Confederate and Union soldiers). Reading the visual and neglecting to negotiate with the linguistic and treating the illustration as authority on meaning are potential limitations when utilizing graphic novels. However, misinterpretations also provide an opportunity for students to engage in critical source analysis. The students' misreading when compared with other interpretations of the event, (i.e. primary source documents, textbooks, film, trade books, and journal articles) allows for depth and breadth in terms of both perspective taking and a holistic understanding. It is imperative to provide students with the opportunity to interact with a variety of perspectives in order for them to become critical consumers of information, both in the social studies and beyond. As with other robust curricular approaches, we suggest that in social studies instruction, graphic novels be employed intentionally as part of a holistic text set, which leverage the modal affordances and perspectives offered in varied text types to teach targeted content in the curriculum. Our suggestion to use graphic novels in concert with other source materials is not indicative of a deficit perspective of the graphic novel genre.

Rather, it is a realization of both the benefits and limitations of using any singular source in the social studies. Much like film, graphic novels can stand alone as a source that allows students to take up an emotional perspective within the study of historical events, which may not be provided to them in traditional primary and secondary sources (Marcus et al., 2010). All three students engaged in historical interpretation processes, crafting their own narrative of Gettysburg, whether through a comic, a poem, or a letter. In each of the three cases, the students synthesized information gleaned from the images, text, and the author's notes. They adopted a perspective about the battle and the address, and inferred emotional responses to the events surrounding their characters.

As students negotiated meanings between the visual and linguistic semiotic systems, they did so differently; some began with a linguistic or visual narration of events that led to an inference, whereas others launched with a linguistic or visual inference and narrated the support for making inferential claims. The different approaches to reading a graphic novel indicated that the visual and the linguistic text can serve as a scaffold for meaning making, allowing the reading to preview the text through one of the semiotic systems.

Given the relative dearth of literature on the process of meaning making with graphic novels, identifying how students navigate the graphic text is an important contribution for research moving forward. For example, students' vacillation between image and language as they transacted with the text reflected a textual mobility not unlike 21st century digital readers who negotiate texts within texts within texts and carve out their own meaning-making channels (Coiro, 2011). Graphic novels and the need to recast meanings across sign systems (Siegel, 2006) offer opportunities for students to use diverse approaches to construct meaning.

Conclusion

The three students in this study approached the reading of the graphic novel through three diverse pathways employing multiple literacy strategies in order to construct meaning. Each student used the visual as well as the linguistic text to infer meaning about the Battle of Gettysburg and the *Gettysburg Address*. The students' inferences, whether about the actions or the emotions, were made by merging information gleaned from the visual and linguistic text, often using one sign system to scaffold the other. The findings from this study indicated that teachers may need to consider how they address the visual components of a text regardless of whether or not it is a graphic novel. While visual components are present in other texts that teachers often take up in classrooms, (such as textbooks, newspaper articles, videos, and digital hypertext), the linguistic often takes precedence in instruction. Visual components may be briefly referenced as an addendum to the linguistic information students receive or, sometimes, not referenced at all. When teachers provide students with instruction that privileges the visual as well as the linguistic, students may be able to use these texts in tandem to inform a deeper understanding of historical events.

Robust literacy learning in the 21st century social studies classroom promotes semiotic awareness--the notion that different sign systems have different meaning potentials (Towndrow, Nelson, & Yusuf, 2015). Thus, teachers and students who approach content in the social studies with semiotic awareness do so with a critical eye toward the limitations and affordances of any one text in supporting historical interpretations. Reading graphic novels such as *Gettysburg* (Butzer, 2009) requires semiotic awareness in order to comprehend the implied meanings between linguistic and visual texts. Further, interpretive work with graphic novels generates new insights into the text--insights potentially unavailable when reading is limited to only one sign system. As social studies teachers and students take up multimodal literacy practices as they read graphic novels, their readings challenge the verbocentricity of typical classrooms by promoting new learning about how to read graphic novels and what such readings might afford.

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Appendix

Gettysburg RAFT Assessment

For this assignment, you will select one of the roles listed in the options below. You will then write about either the Battle of Gettysburg or the *Gettysburg Address* using one of the format options listed below. Be sure to include information that demonstrates YOUR understanding of the events and/or impact of the battle or the meaning of the address.

Role: Select one of the roles listed below.

    ____ Union soldier

    ____ Confederate soldier

    ____ Gettysburg resident

    ____ Member of Abraham Lincoln's staff

Audience: Someone in a different state after the *Gettysburg Address*.

Format: Select one of the formats listed below.

    ____ Letter

    ____ Newspaper article

    ____ Comic strip

    ____ Song or Poem

Topic: Select from the options below.

    ____ Events of the Battle of Gettysburg

    ____ Impact of the battle on the citizens of the town

    ____ Message of the *Gettysburg Address*